

# Liberty Call

## USS SS-287 Bowfin

# Pearl Harbor

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USS Bowfin Submarine Museum & Park’s mission is to restore and preserve the WWII submarine USS Bowfin (SS-287), and to display her and other submarine related artifacts to the public, for the education and enjoyment of all. Bowfin, just across from the Arizona Memorial Visitors Center, holds a complete history of the submarine service. The main exhibit is the restored World War II submarine, USS Bowfin (SS-287), which visitors can walk through and explore.

“I am so glad that people are able to get a mental picture of what it was like aboard a WWII Submarine,” said Capt. Jerry Hofwolt (USN ret.), executive director of the USS Bowfin Park.

Bowfin serves as a tribute to the hard fight for freedom waged over and under the sea. The boat (not “ship”) was launched Dec. 7, 1942, a year to the day its homeport was struck by an invading force of Japanese planes that launched the entry of the United States into World War II. The boat was nicknamed the “Pearl Harbor Avenger.” During its war career, the boat completed nine war patrols, with 44 enemy vessels sunk.

The boat was decommissioned after the end of the war and laid idle for a short time before being re-commissioned for the Korean Conflict in 1951-54. Bowfin was transferred to a Naval Reserve training boat in 1960-71.

In early 1972, World War II submariner and Pearl Harbor survivor Adm. Bernard A. “Chick” Clarey Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet and Rear Adm. Paul L. Lacy Commander, Submarine Force Pacific Fleet, approached the Secretary of the Navy about acquiring Bowfin as a memorial to the U.S. Submarine Force at Pearl Harbor. She was then towed to Pearl Harbor’s Naval Inactive Ships Maintenance Facility.

In August 1979, the submarine was towed to Pier 39, near downtown Honolulu, where a group of volunteers from the civilian and military community eagerly assisted in cleaning and restoring the Bowfin after years of neglect.

In December 1980, Bowfin was moved to her present day location at Pearl Harbor. It opened to the public as a permanent museum in April 1981, and was declared a national historic landmark in 1986.

The park and museum are operated by the non-profit Pacific Fleet Submarine Memorial Association.

“We’re tremendously proud to portray a small piece of Pearl Harbor history,” Hofwolt said. “It shows the sacrifice our fathers and grandfathers made to preserve freedom.”

Guests tour the submarine with a cassette tape player and headset, with a narration read by a former commander of the Bowfin.

The boat is cramped and narrow, as expected. It’s amazing, however, to see how much equipment and facilities a submariner could fit in so small a space.

“The Bowfin is the best-kept restored submarine in the world. I think we’re the only submarine left that still shows how the crew used to have to sleep right above their torpedoes. Just walking through with a couple people, it’s crowded, it’s amazing to imagine it full of 85 Sailors,” said Hofwolt. Visitors can walk from the stern to the bow on the second deck.

On the way, guests will go through the small galley, where the men ate in shifts, past the engine and communications rooms, where war messages were typed on manual typewriters.

On land nearby is a circle of 52 stones, three-foot-tall monuments commemorating each submarine lost in WWII, along with more than 3,500 men who served on them. The stones have plaques listing each boat’s, its crew, and its last mission.

There are also several other outdoor exhibits, including the conning tower of USS Parche (SS-384) and a Japanese Type 4 Kaiten, or suicide torpedo. Hofwolt said the museum shows the history of the submarine fleet and how they lead technology in the Navy today.

The museum exhibits a collection of submarine-related artifacts such as submarine weapon systems, plaques, photographs, paintings, original recruiting posters, battle flags, detailed submarine models and naval uniforms illustrating the history of the submarine service.

- Specifically, visitors will find:
- Paperwork from the first WWII Japanese prisoner of war, Ensign Sakamaki. His Japanese midget submarine, launched hours before the attack on Pearl Harbor, malfunctioned, and he was captured after landing on Ohau.
  - A picture of Lt. j.g. George Bush being plucked by the water by a submarine crew after his T-31 Avenger plane, named the Barbara III (after his wife) crashed in the Pacific in WWII.
  - The Bowfin’s ship bell. Museum staff bought the bell, found four years ago, from a California woman, who had found it at an estate auction.
  - An actual C-3 Poseidon missile, cut into sections to show the inner workings of the multiple launching system.
- The museum also includes a 40-seat mini-theater, featuring submarine documentary videos. Bob Burt, assistant director of the park, said the submarine force has been real good to them, sending plaques, letters and other memorabilia.”

“A lot of the WWII veterans are dying. If we don’t keep museums and exhibits like this, the younger generation won’t know anything about the war. It’s a period we don’t want to forget.”

Bowfin now has a web site that has information for everyone, including a site for children so that they may also learn the history of WWII and the submarine fleet. The Web site is [www.bowfin.org](http://www.bowfin.org).

Bowfin Park is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., with the last tour of the submarine starting at 4:30 p.m. Admission fees to the park are \$8 for adults and \$3 for children (4-12). Discounts are available to senior citizens, military personnel and Hawaii residents, with proper identification. For more information, call (808) 423-1341.

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(Top) The Bowfin’s ship’s bell and commissioning pennant sits on display inside the museum portion of the memorial complex. The museum takes a tour from the beginning of submarine history all the way to present day information on the Navy’s newest submarines. The USS Bowfin sits in Pearl Harbor next door to the USS Arizona Memorial Visitors Center.



A visitor takes an opportunity to look through a submarine periscope at the museum. The center offers numerous “hands on” and interactive learning exhibits.



The Bowfin Submarine and Park also offers a memorial area to the World War II era 52 submarines and their crews who gave their lives during the war.

# Avengers